

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 10A

USA TODAY
27 October 1983

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Guest columnist

It's all too easy to let secrets slip

STANFORD, Calif. — Whether we like it or not, the United States is the object of a huge intelligence-gathering espionage operation.

This operation was honed and perfected by Yuri Andropov, head of the KGB for 15 years prior to becoming the leader of the Soviet Union.

In this age of sophisticated computers, information from all kinds of sources can be stored and analyzed and then used to verify or to develop highly damaging reports.

That is why the Reagan administration is requiring officials at the highest level of the government, who have access to Sensitive Compartmented Information (SCI), to submit for "pre-publication review" anything they write after they leave office concerning intelligence matters.

No one is contending that these officials would conscious-

ly furnish information to the Soviet intelligence network.

However, there is a possibility that in trying to be interesting or informative, or to meet a publisher's request for details, they might inadvertently let something slip.

An open society is particularly vulnerable to spying and intelligence gathering. No one advocates the adoption of security measures that result in a police state or a Big Brother mentality. However, there are reasonable precautions that can be taken, and the Reagan program is an honest attempt to take them.

Signing the agreement will remind officials that, because of the nature of their work, they have a continuing obligation to protect highly sensitive intelligence matters.

For most people, this, along with their own good sense, will

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be sufficient protection. The submission of their writings for clearance will ensure that there have not been any unwitting disclosures.

In all of this, the Reagan administration and succeeding administrations have a duty to ensure that pre-publication review does not take the form of unwarranted censorship.

The deletion of embarrassing or politically damaging information cannot be tolerated, and a system must be devised that will ensure that this does not occur.

An appropriate time limit, court review — with the burden on the government to prove its case — and continuing congressional oversight are essential safeguards.